

## **Ask the Observer**

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**Question:** My brother lives in Canada, and recently applied in Toronto for a non-immigrant visa to the United States. According to him, the application had to be completed and submitted online, which I have never heard of before. My visa is set to expire soon, and I would like to renew it. Will I be able to submit my application online, or does the U.S. Embassy in Jamaica still use paper applications?

**Answer:** At this time applicants applying in Jamaica do not have the option to submit their applications online, but that will soon change. Under the current system, all applicants must fill out the DS-156 (Non-Immigrant Visa Application), and DS-157 (Supplemental Non-Immigrant Visa Application), and submit printed copies of the forms at the time of their interview. We will make the paperless DS-160 application form available for voluntary use as of 4 March 2010, and it will become mandatory beginning 24 March 2010.

### **What is the DS-160?**

The new DS-160, Non-immigrant Visa Electronic Application, is a fully integrated online application form that will be used to collect the necessary application information from persons seeking a non-immigrant visa. The DS-160 will be submitted electronically to the Department of State via the Internet, unlike the DS-156 and 157, which were printed and submitted by hand. Consular officers will use the information entered on the DS-160 to process the visa application and, combined with your personal interview, will determine an applicant's eligibility for a non-immigrant visa.

Currently 32 Embassies and Consulates around the world are using the DS-160, and the U.S. Department of State has mandated that the rest have until 30 April 2010 to transition to the new form. Applicants in Jamaica will be required to use the new form, effective 24 March 2010.

### **How do I complete the DS-160?**

All visa applicants are required to fill in the online application form, which can be found at <https://ceac.state.gov/genniv/>. Please be sure to fill out *all* fields that are not marked as optional. The application will not allow you to submit a DS-160 if any mandatory fields have been left blank. Furthermore, if the online application has not been completed fully and accurately, the applicant will be requested to return for a second interview with a newly completed application.

You will still need to bring a photograph to your interview. The requirements for the photograph have not changed, and can be found on the State Department website at: <http://travel.state.gov/pdf/USPassportDigitalImageRequirements.pdf>.

Once completed, the information in the DS-160 will be electronically transmitted to the United States Department of State. You will receive a confirmation page, which includes some biographical information and a bar code confirmation number, will be automatically generated. Bring this confirmation page to their interview. You will not longer be required to bring your entire application form with you.

After the confirmation page has been printed, you will still need to pay the visa application fee at any NCB branch office and schedule an appointment through our call center or appointment website. It is important to note that the processes for making an appointment and paying the visa application fee remain the same, as does the requirement that an applicant provide proof of all economic and social ties outside of the United States.

### **What are the benefits of the DS-160?**

The DS-160 was developed to improve visa processing, and it offers several benefits to applicants, such as:

- *Convenience.* The DS-160 contains all the forms necessary for many types of visas in one document, so you will not have to worry about which application(s) you need to fill out in order to apply. The application will also only require you to answer questions that are necessary for your particular purpose of travel.
- *Privacy.* Any information you provide is transmitted directly to the United States Department of State. Unlike the current application, no personal information is printed on paper that could be viewed by others without your authorization.
- *Efficiency.* Because the DS-160 is submitted online, your information will be processed prior to your interview. If the application is filled out correctly, the whole process should be faster for applicants and consular officers alike. While your information is transmitted before your interview, we will not process your application until we have spoken with you - **all applicants will still be interviewed to determine their qualifications for a visa.**

Again, U.S. Embassy Kingston is still processing nonimmigrant visa applications using the standard, printed application form available on our website and there is no change to the process of applying for a nonimmigrant visa. In fact, once we transition to the new online

form, the main change will be paperwork—you will no longer have to carry your application to our office. We will continue to update you on the transition to the new DS-160 online application form, so please stay tuned. Our website continues to be the best source of information for visa application requirements: [www.kingston.usembassy.gov](http://www.kingston.usembassy.gov).